Lest We Forget

Lionel Hartley

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Lionel Hartley
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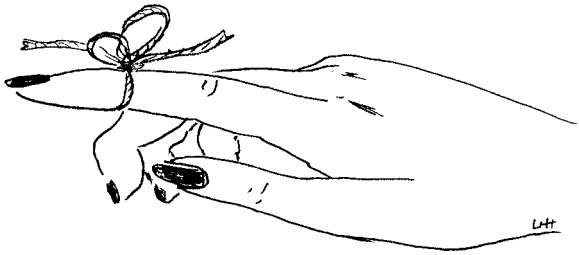


Introduction

At home I have a small storage box for USB memory sticks that is (what I believe to be) appropriately labelled “Memory Sticks”.

While thinking about an appropriate introduction for this book, I spied the box and read again the label. The label says that memory sticks.

So if memory really sticks, why do I forget so much? Or does memory not really stick.

Memory, I’m told, is what enables you to dial the first part of a telephone number correctly. Our mind is not like a filing cabinet, as a filing cabinet is a place where things get lost alphabetically; our mind is a place where things get lost randomly.

Forgetting is a common problem that can have both minor and serious consequences because memory is, I suggest, a God-given gift to make us

wonder what we forgot.

“Beware that thou forget not the Lord thy God, in not keeping his commandments, and his judgments, and his statutes, which I command thee this day:

(12) Lest when thou hast eaten and art full, and hast built goodly houses, and dwelt therein;

(13) And when thy herds and thy flocks multiply, and thy silver and thy gold is multiplied, and all that thou hast is multiplied;

(14) Then thine heart be lifted up, and thou forget the Lord thy God, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage;

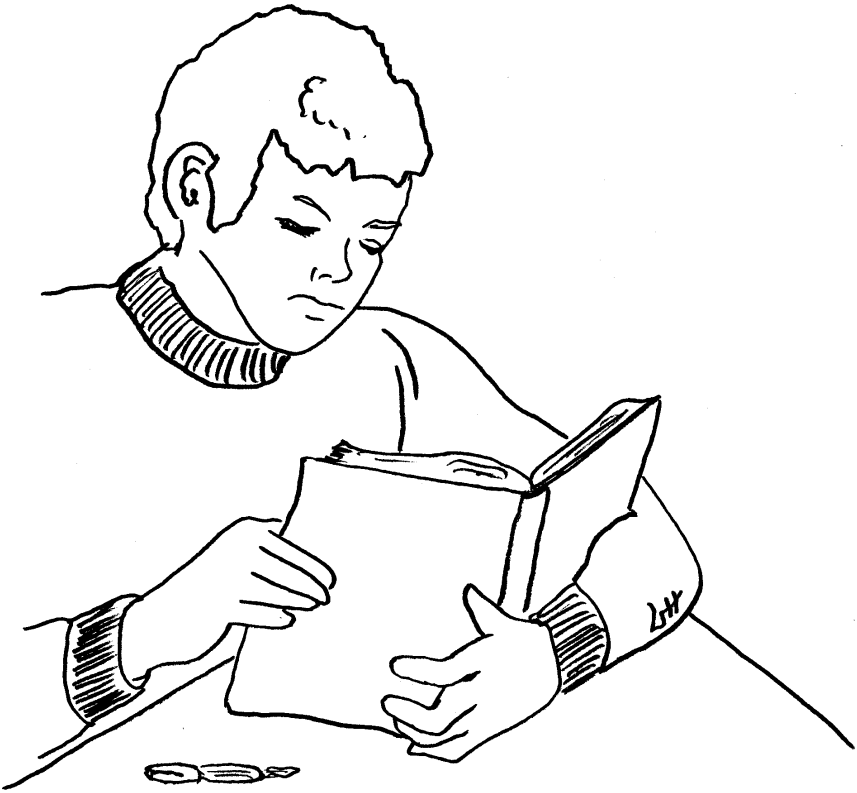
(15) Who led thee through that great and terrible wilderness, wherein were fiery serpents, and scorpions, and drought, where there was no water; who brought thee forth water out of the rock of flint;

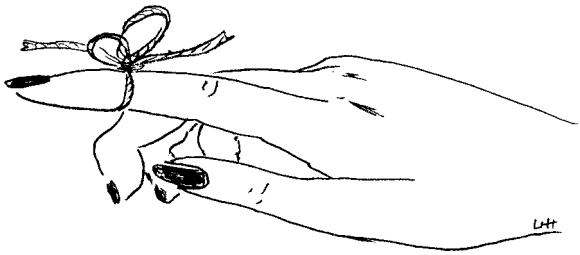
(16) Who fed thee in the wilderness with manna, which thy fathers knew not, that he might humble thee, and that he might prove thee, to do thee good at thy latter end;

(17) And thou say in thine heart, My power and the

might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth.

(18) But thou shalt remember the Lord thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day" (Deuteronomy 8:11-18).





Forgetfulness

Francis Bacon wrote, “It’s not what men eat, but what they digest, that makes them strong. It’s not what men earn, but what they save, that makes them rich. And it’s not what men read, but what they remember, that makes them wise”.

There was once an absent-minded professor who became so absorbed in his work that he forgot the simplest details. One morning his wife said, “Now Henry, remember, we are moving today. Here, I’m putting this note in your pocket. Don’t forget.”

The day passed by and the man came home to his house. He entered the front door, and found the place empty.

Distraught, he walked out to the curb and sat down. A young boy walked up to him, and he asked him, “Little boy, do you know the people who used to live here?”

The boy replied, “Sure, Dad, mother told me you’d forget.”

Deuteronomy 8 is Moses’ expression of love for his nation, which was a movement following God. Moses’ words remind the people that abundance and prosperity are blessings from God, and that we need to give thanks for God’s grace and serve God properly. The main theme is “Remember all the ways that God has blessed you.”

Amid tragedies, there are still good things happening as we live our lives. It is good to forget regrettable, sad and painful memories. Being able to forget is a blessing from heaven.

I think about David Livingstone when he climbed into the pulpit of a little church in Scotland.

He’d honed his sermon. He’d prepared it so very well. He even memorised it for effect. He wanted to be a great preacher. He wanted to go and give his life on the mission field.

And when he got up to preach that night, he looked the part but forgot his sermon altogether; so he apologized to the people and left in great shame.

But Robert Moffat, the famous missionary, was there. And Moffat came up to him after the service and said, “You can [still] be a great and wonderful servant of God. Why don’t you go to medical school?”

Today when we think of missions in Africa we think of David Livingstone. I have sometimes wondered how God would have used David Livingstone if he had remembered his sermon?

However, there are things that we should not forget. For example, Henry Ford, for example, forgot to put a reverse gear in his first car.

Many problems occur due to forgetfulness. A teacher received this note from a parent: Please excuse Jennifer for missing school yesterday. We forgot to get the Sunday paper off the porch, and when we found it on Monday, we thought it was Sunday.

We see incidents happening here and there because people have forgotten what needs to be remembered. Someone has quipped that memory is what makes you wonder what you forgot to do.

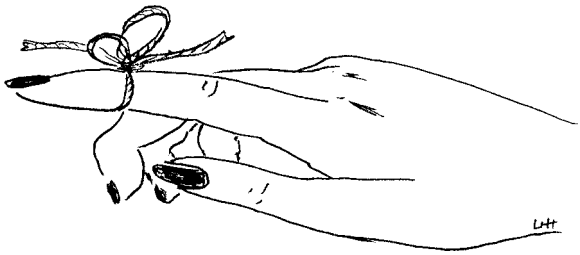
Mary Graves in ‘Getting Sober for Christmas’ tells the story of a pastor who was officiating at a

funeral. When he was done, he was asked to lead the funeral procession as it made its way to the cemetery.

So he got into his car, and he started driving at the head of the funeral procession. He flipped on his radio and became preoccupied, lost in thought; he forgot where he was going. About that time, he passed a K-Mart and thought about something he needed to pick up.

So he turned into the parking lot. As he was looking for a parking space, he just happened to glance into the rear-view mirror and saw a string of cars following, all with their lights on. So self-absorbed, so forgetful and then so humbled.

I have even been told in jest that the man who discovered a cure for amnesia has since forgotten what it was.



Tragic Forgetfulness

There are even tragic events that happen on account of our having forgotten how human beings must behave, and our failure to remember God's grace.

There are many examples in the Bible of tragedies stemming from forgetfulness. Our ancestors in the Garden of Eden forgot about God and eventually were expelled from God's garden.

Their descendants on the Babylonian plains forgot about Almighty God, and challenged God's authority with their human wisdom, attempting to build the Tower of Babel. They forgot that they themselves were created by God.

According to Job's confession, they forgot that "when the wind of God blows, all will be scattered." They were scattered in the midst of chaos (Job 21:17-18)

As time went on, God's people continued to live amidst the "tragedy of forgetfulness." They spent 430 years as slaves in Egypt, wandered in the wilderness, and lived as captives in Babylon.

Deuteronomy 8:1-18 says, All the commandments which I command thee this day shall ye observe to do, that ye may live, and multiply, and go in and possess the land which the Lord sware unto your fathers.

(2) And thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no.

(3) And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live.

(4) Thy raiment waxed not old upon thee, neither did thy foot swell, these forty years.

(5) Thou shalt also consider in thine heart, that, as a man chasteneth his son, so the Lord thy God chasteneth thee.

(6) Therefore thou shalt keep the commandments of the Lord thy God, to walk in his ways, and to fear him.

(7) For the Lord thy God bringeth thee into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and depths that spring out of valleys and hills;

(8) A land of wheat, and barley, and vines, and fig trees, and pomegranates; a land of oil olive, and honey;

(9) A land wherein thou shalt eat bread without scarceness, thou shalt not lack any thing in it; a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills thou mayest dig brass.

(10) When thou hast eaten and art full, then thou shalt bless the Lord thy God for the good land which he hath given thee.

(11) Beware that thou forget not the Lord thy God, in not keeping his commandments, and his judgments, and his statutes, which I command thee this day: (12)

Lest when thou hast eaten and art full, and hast built goodly houses, and dwelt therein; (13) And when thy herds and thy flocks multiply, and thy silver and thy gold is multiplied, and all that thou hast is multiplied;

(14) Then thine heart be lifted up, and thou forget the Lord thy God, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage;

(15) Who led thee through that great and terrible wilderness, wherein were fiery serpents, and scorpions, and drought, where there was no water; who brought thee forth water out of the rock of flint;

(16) Who fed thee in the wilderness with manna, which thy fathers knew not, that he might humble thee, and that he might prove thee, to do thee good at thy latter end;

(17) And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth.

(18) But thou shalt remember the Lord thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day.

The word of Deuteronomy was given to the

forgetful people of Israel when they were at the threshold of Canaan. Today's scripture is the second sermon of Moses on the Moab plains. The people of Israel, after 430 years of pain and suffering, stood at the entry point to Canaan by the grace of God. God warned them what to be cautious as they encountered the new land.

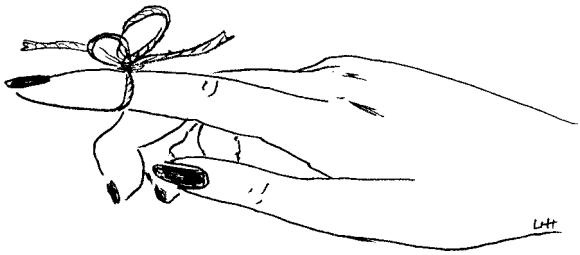
At the same time, God said Moses could not enter Canaan, though he had been longing to go there for 40 years. Moses, wanting to weep, begged God to allow his entry. But God said, "That is enough," and Moses obeyed God as his sovereign.

Though he had come all the way to the boundary of Canaan, he could not enter. But Moses' love for his nation continued. He prayed for his people, and proclaimed encouraging words with a sincere and passionate heart.

Therefore, the Deuteronomy text expresses the will of Moses, who was about to die.

Though he could not accompany his people, he spoke to them in a sermon, warning them what to be careful about in the unfamiliar land of Canaan. And then he passed away.

What we have read from the Holy Bible emphasizes above all, “Do not forget; remember clearly”.



What to Remember

"What should we not forget? The scripture says, "Remember the time when you were in Egypt." Extreme famine forced 70 members of Jacob's family to leave the land where they were born.

Thanks to God working through Joseph, they went to live in the fertile soil of Goshen, located in the Nile River delta in Egypt.

As time passed, great kings appeared, and the people became slaves, losing their identify as free persons. They suffered under heavy construction work, building the nation's massive warehouses.

As captives from birth, they lived without hope. Egypt was a place of suffering and sorrow where people were even forced to kill their own children.

In this place of tragedy and despair, they were saved by the grace of God. 40 years passed, and it

was easy for them to forget the memories of pain and suffering, but God reminded them, “Remember your lives as slaves in Egypt.”

This was not about having the people of Israel become enemies of Egypt for its mistreatment of them. It was asking them to remember their actual circumstances.

Many times throughout history nations have been faced with an “Egypt.”

I think, for example of something I read recently about the Nation of Korea. At the time when imperial Japan was full of ambition to conquer Asia, modern-day Korea’s ancestors were given to political squabbles and the pleasure of drinking in front of idols.

Japan occupied their land and stole their national sovereignty by military force. They set out to trample the Korean native culture and annihilate the people’s spirit.

They took young Korean people and used them as human shields on battlefields, and as sex slaves.

Their persecution of the established church was

extreme. They stole church bells, and tore out the Pentateuch and the book of Revelation from the Bible.

They ordered Christians to read only the four gospels in the New Testament, and to use the Old Testament merely as an auxiliary textbook.

They forced church members to salute the Japanese flag before worship, and starting in September 1943, they prevented people from gathering for Sunday evening and Wednesday services. They forced people to worship at their shrines.

They made plans to capture and massacre the leaders of their nation and church on August 18, 1945.

During those dark days of the Korean nation, their language, family names, freedom, young people, and national spirit were robbed by this outside force.

In Deuteronomy 32:7, as Moses faced death, he said to the younger generation who had not experienced the time in Egypt, “Remember the old days; recall the historical dates.”

Why was that important? When the people of Israel forgot about their time in Egypt, they lost their

spirit of thanksgiving and their vitality.

When they were wandering in the wilderness, the act of remembering Egypt gave them new strength.

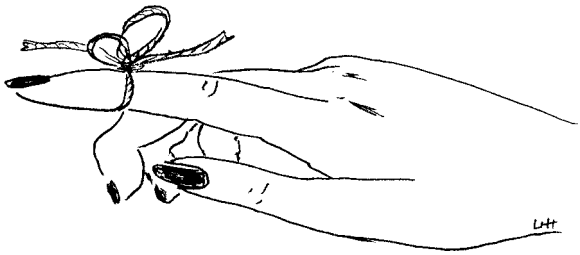
When they were living in abundance, God asked them to remember the time when they had been slaves in Egypt.

We also have a spiritual Egypt.

Tee Apostle Peter said, “Once you were not a people, and once you had not received mercy” (1 Peter 2:10).

We were dead in spirit, caught in a trap of death. We were children of anger. We were children of collapse (Ephesians 1). Only people who know exactly where they have been can serve God well.

God has endless compassion on us. Only people who know what pain and death is like can thank God for giving them the promise of heaven, and can reach for it in delight.



Do Not Forget God

What should we not forget? Scripture says, “Do not forget God.”

The liberation of the people of Israel was God’s work and God’s grace. No one imagined that the people of Israel would be liberated from Pharaoh’s oppression. Moses came before Pharaoh with God’s authority, but Pharaoh scorned Moses. It would have been impossible, but for God’s grace.

God asked the Israelites to remember that they were chosen out of God’s endless love, not because they were great human beings or because they were numerous.

God asked them to remember who had cared for them when they were going through the wilderness.

God asked them to remember who it was that

provided manna and quail from heaven.

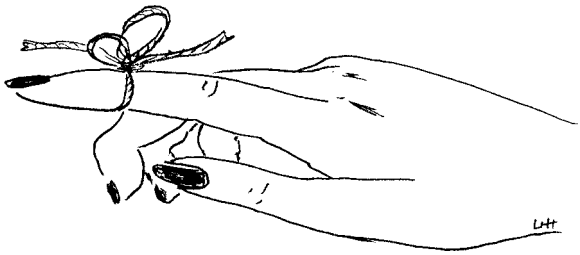
Up to this very day, the people of Israel remember the God who saved them 4,000 years ago, as they observe the Passover, their liberation day.

The book of Exodus, a detailed record of Israel's liberation story, introduces the Israelites as "my people" (Exodus 3:10).

God says, "I will be your God" (6:7). The Israelites were called to serve God, and God liberated them for that service.

1 Peter 2:9 says, "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light"

God's people have a calling. If we forget the calling, we cannot do anything. We cannot stand in righteousness before God.



Hindrances to Remembering

When does forgetfulness happen? When do we need to be careful?

God is deeply interested in that time. God asks us not to forget God if we become rich, when everything is going well, or when we live in a beautiful land. People do not forget God when they are in difficult times, when there are problems, or when they are undergoing pain and suffering. The wartime saying was that there are no atheists in foxholes. But when everything is going well, and there are no worries, we tend to forget God.

Some of us may think, “Only if this problem is solved can I believe in God.” Others may think, “When this difficulty has passed, I will do my best to serve God.”

In fact, when you are poor you may not have such a problem. Perhaps difficult times are not the

issue. The real problem arises when there are no worries, when everything is going well, when people are wealthy and comfortable. When we're just sitting in the premises instead of standing on the promises.

We need to pay attention to the way God cared about the people of Israel: not just when they were in the wilderness, but when they were entering Canaan. When everything is going well, God encourages them not to forget the difficult times.

God asks them to be careful "when you have eaten your fill and have built fine houses and live in them, and when your herds and flocks have multiplied, and your silver and gold is multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied."

God knows that when people become rich and have no worries, they may become lazy in their spiritual life and stop seeking God. That is the reason why God reminds them at this time, not to forget.

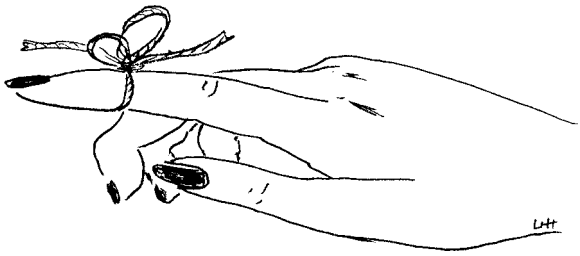
If I become full of arrogance, I will end up trusting in a god that is not the God. I may replace God with something else, or worship other gods.

Any time that I think other things are more

precious than God, I will end up making them my god. B. Goudzwaard from the Netherlands said, “The most serious problem of modern times is idol worship.”

You may say, “I don’t worship other gods or idols.” Even if we don’t worship a stone image, many people worship material idols, idols of pleasure, and idols of knowledge. In the end, a life of idol worship is a life of disobedience to God’s words.

Jesus explained that even when you do not directly disobey God, if we are not obeying God, that is also disobedience.



Obedience

The Russian author and Nobel prize winner Alexander Solzhenitsyn said in a speech in 1983 at the Templeton award ceremony: "More than half a century ago, when I was still a child, I recall hearing a number of older people offer the following explanation for the great disasters that had befallen Russia [quote]: *'Men have forgotten God; that's why all this has happened'*."

He goes on to say, "Since then I have spent well-nigh fifty years working on the history of our Revolution; in the process I have read hundreds of books, collected hundreds of personal testimonies, and have already contributed eight volumes of my own toward the effort of clearing away the rubble left by that upheaval."

"But if I were asked today to formulate as concisely as possible the main cause of the ruinous Revolution that swallowed up some sixty million of

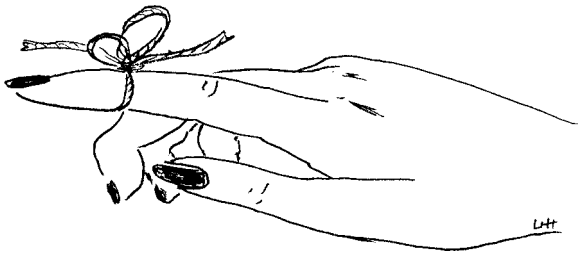
our people, I could not put it more accurately than to repeat: Men have forgotten God; that's why all this has happened."

The Jewish people, who lived through the greatest suffering in modern history, built the Holocaust museum and named it "Yad Vashem," which in Hebrew means, "Remember." This museum commemorates the six million people who were massacred in Germany from 1939 to 1945.

The maxim "Forgive, but do not forget" is posted at the entrance of the museum, which carries graphic depictions of the horrors of that time. Jewish people also built a holocaust museum in front of the U.S. White House in Washington, D.C.

As they visit the museum, they reaffirm their resolve to pass on the memories of pain and suffering to their descendents. They believe that if they forget those times, they will be ruined.

I suggest that you and I do not really have this kind of "Yad Vashem" spirit. We are not only poor forgivers, we forget too easily. If we forget our painful history, it will repeat itself.



The Tragedy of Forgetfulness

Historian Arnold Toynbee found the cause for the decline and fall of the Roman Empire was in the mental deterioration of the noble family of Rome, not in the invasion by the powerful Germanic people. That is, the ruling class was trapped in pleasure-seeking,

and it oppressed the proletarians, and this led to the collapse of the Roman Empire. It was a tragedy of forgetfulness.

A man was going down a street when in a store window he saw a very beautiful picture of the crucifixion. As he gazed spellbound at the vividly pictured story, he suddenly became conscious that at his side stood a young boy.

The boy, too, was gazing at the picture, and his tense expression made the man know that “The Crucifixion” had really gripped the eager little soul.

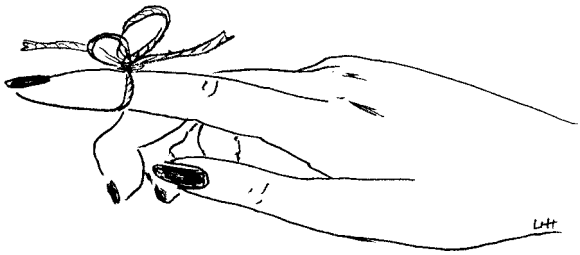
Touching the boy on the shoulder, the man said, “Sonny, what does it mean?”

“Doncha know?” he answered, his face full of the marvel of the man’s ignorance. “That there man is Jesus, an’ them others is Roman soldiers, an’ the woman what’s cryin’ is His mother, an’,” he added, “they killed ‘im!”

The man did not want to move from in front of that impressive piece of artwork but he had other things he had to do, so he turned and walked away.

In a few moments he heard footsteps on the street behind him, and there came rushing up the boy. “Say, mister,” he exclaimed breathlessly, “I forgot to tell you, but He rose again!”

It would be foolish of me to ask what you have forgotten as you would not be able to remember it to be able tell me, however of those things that you do remember, of those things Scripture tells us we must remember, our scripture also tells us that we must not forget.



Does God Forget?

According to evangelist Luis Palau, Clara Barton, the founder of the American Red Cross, was reminded one day of a vicious deed that someone had done to her years before.

But she acted as if she had never heard of the incident. “Don’t you remember it?” her friend asked. “No,” came Barton’s reply. “I distinctly remember forgetting it.”

Joni Eareckson Tada, in *Diamonds in the Dust*, wrote, “Poor memories are a part of the human condition. And so when God tells us he will remember our sins no more, I’m puzzled. How could God possibly forget? That’s my job!

But He does. And His forgetting of my sin is a complete removal from His knowledge of every sin you and 1 have committed.

Then why do we feel so bad about our past sins? Because we confuse sin with its impression.

Got a notepad nearby? Let me show you how this can be so. Write the word “sin” on the page. Press hard. Now tear off that sheet of paper, crumble it up, and throw it across the room. That’s how God forgets your sin.

Now take your pencil and rub it on the new page at an angle, back and forth, over the same location where you wrote. And guess what. The ghost of the word “sin” appears.

That’s what our flawed memories do. We go back over the deep impression left by transgressions in our life and we feel just as guilty. It’s as if the sin never left.

But be encouraged, the impression of sin is not the same thing as sin. And with David you can cry out, “Remember thou me! I can’t forget my scars, it seems, Lord. But you have forgotten their cause. Look upon me with loving, kind eyes.

It’s your choice. Will you continue to work over forgiven sin as with a pencil? Or will you let the Holy

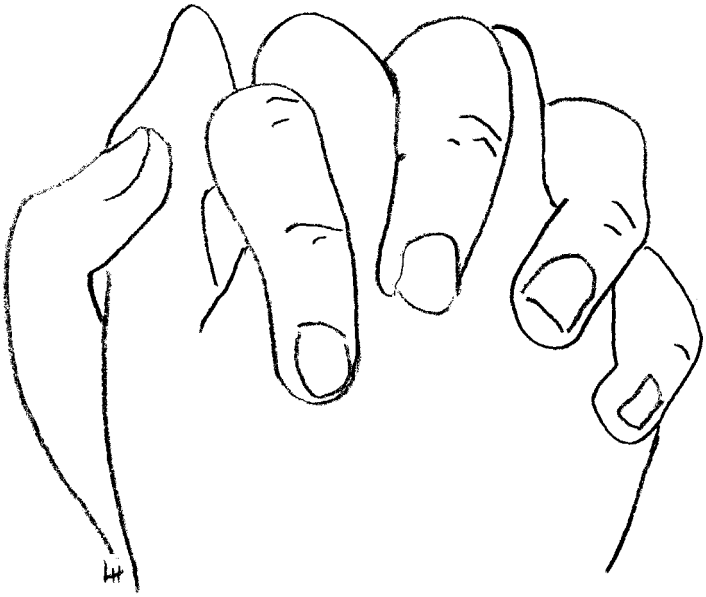
Spirit work His lovingkindness?”

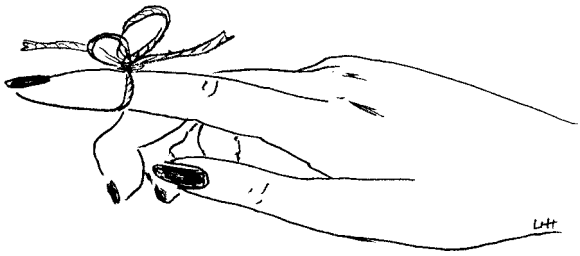
Roy Grimm wrote, ‘Our friends were out of town for the weekend and their 5-year-old, Luke, was staying with us. At dinner, out of the blue, he said, “You know, one time I broke my mom’s lamp.”

I asked if she was angry when it happened. “She was disappointed,” Luke replied, which I assured him was understandable.

We continued for a minute or so, then Luke said, “But I don’t understand ... Mom says it’s all forgotten ... but I still remember it. Why can’t she?”

“Because you have a nice mom, Luke”.’





Finally

Remember to thank God that He created us in such a way that we can remember, with the gift of memory preventing us from being forever confined to an immediate present.

Thank Him that creation is filled with wondrous people and things to give us pleasant things to remember.

Thank Him too that in contemplating His love for us we can be comforted when unpleasant memories crowd into our thoughts.

And whenever in our busyness we forget Him may He not forget us.

DON'T FORGET!